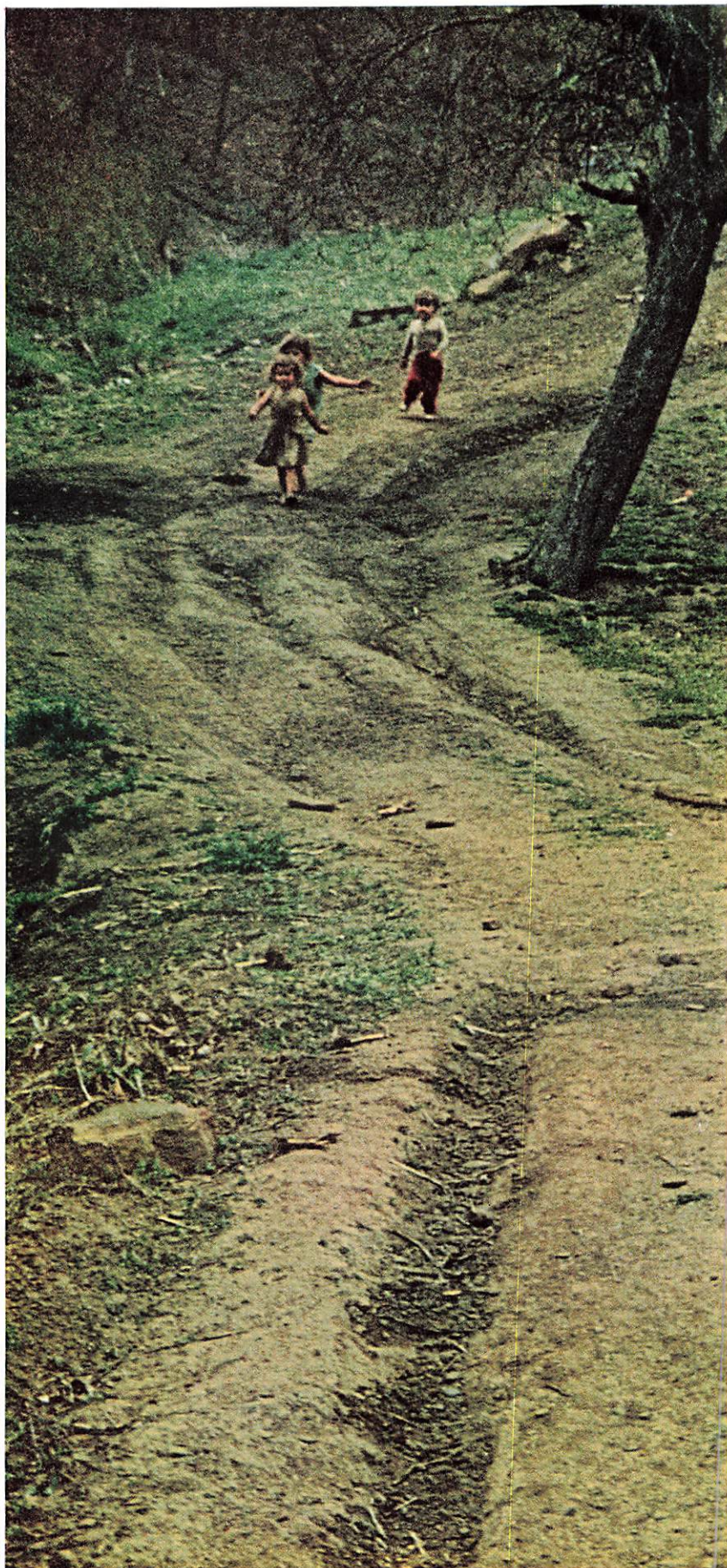


*Horseback  
Mail  
delivery  
in Knott Co.  
Kentucky*

Man with the mail meets a youthful welcoming committee at one of the stops on his horseback route in Knott County, Kentucky. Irvin Pratt has worn out five mounts in the 16 years he has carried the mail from Pine Top to Pippa Passes. The 68-year-old postman delivers "anything within reason," but now draws the line on the mail-order tires he once toted. When the author asked Mr. Pratt how long he planned to ride the exhausting 18-mile mountain route, the Cumberlander replied promptly, "Long as they're expecting me."

EKTACHROME © N.G.S.





Berea, Kentucky, by the U. S. Forest Service. In addition to determining the proper time and way to harvest such plants, the researchers under Dr. Arnold Krochmal, an economic botanist, hope to develop ways for mountain people to supplement their incomes by cultivating and selling the plants to pharmaceutical firms. The Forest Service says that there are at least 126 marketable species of medicinal plants growing in Appalachia.

Loggie Renner said that "during the depression some folks lived pretty good on sassafras tea, sorghum, and corn bread. Nothin' wrong with that. Besides, in times such as that we take care of each other. I principally kept up six or seven families. They'd a' done it for me."

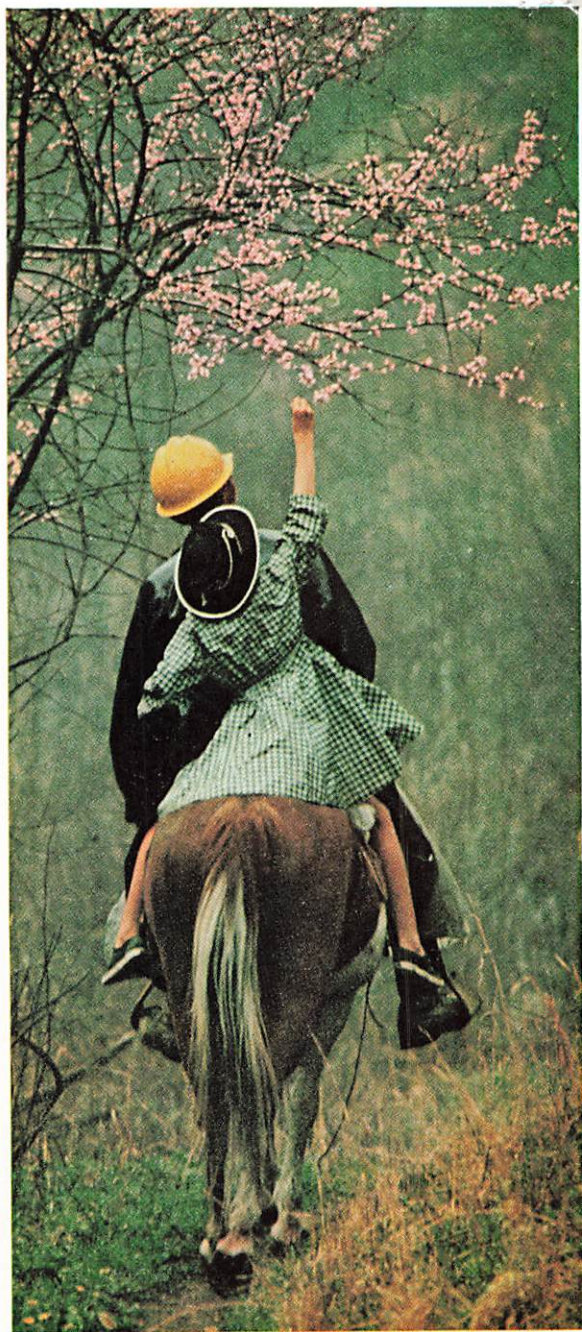
The Great Depression lay far behind Loggie Renner. There were fat cows and pigs on his hilly farm, a cash crop of tobacco was planted, and the big vegetable garden was green and growing.

Loggie has great faith in his garden. He plants it according to the chronology of the mountains. The moon tells him when, he said.

"The moon and the stars around the moon are like a big nature's clock. I plant the potatoes just before the full of the moon, then they won't go down too far in the ground and they will be easier to dig. You plant your corn when the moon is shrinking. My daughter once happened to plant corn on the new moon, and it got so tall she had to bend the stalks over to pick off the roasin' ears."

The rain stopped, and I prepared to leave, but Loggie put a thin, strong hand on my shoulder and said in mock seriousness, "A friend don't get out of here alive without eatin' with me." So we ate, and then I left. As we walked along the dirt path toward my car, Loggie handed me the froe with the new handle and warned, "Be keerful. Old man I know cut his throat with a froe. Took only one lick."

**I**RVIN PRATT was 68 last Christmas Eve, but a \$1,500-a-year contract and a deep sense of responsibility have kept him carrying the mail three times a week from Pine Top, Kentucky, to Pippa Passes (following pages). There are still a dozen or so horse-mounted rural mailmen in eastern Kentucky, holders of so-called "star route" contracts, who must carve their profits from the contract payment, bearing the expenses themselves. I have accompanied several of these mounted postmen, and Pratt's route is by far the most difficult I have seen. He has carried



EKTACHROME (ABOVE) AND KODACHROME © N.G.S.

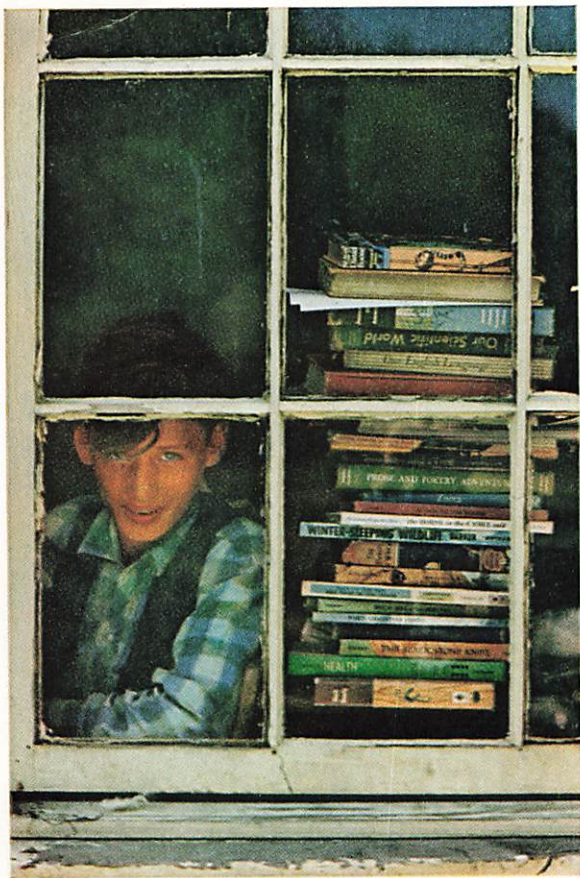
**Extravagance of color** under a warming spring sun lures a young rider to join her grandfather on his rounds (following pages). Redbud blossoms create a rosy glow, soon to be followed by the snowy white of dogwood. May sees a wash of flowering laurel and rhododendrons.

**But winter yields reluctantly.** An April snow sprinkles eastern Kentucky's Pine Mountain with a coating of powdered sugar. Now the hill people must brace for the flood season, when rain swells the streams and water rages unchecked through the valleys. A 1957 flood claimed a dozen lives and left hundreds of families homeless.









KODACHROME © N.G.S.

**Afflicted with an age-old student virus**—spring fever—a pupil gazes longingly through a window of Double Creek School, west of Hyden. The one-room schoolhouse is named for a stream that flows nearby.

the mail, through isolated steep country, off and on since 1955, and has worn out two mules and three horses that he can remember. "Seems like there was another mule or two in there somewheres."

The last mule he had was named John, and Irvin said he cost \$200, an item that cut heavily into his annual net profit. But Irvin understands why the mail must go through.

His clients depend on him for delivery of welfare and pension checks. "And when one's got a boy off in Viet Nam, they're looking hard for me," Irvin said. "It gets seven or eight below zero and the ice is on everything and you think nobody's alive, but when they see me coming, they know there's news."

Irvin's route led us up a creek called Nealy Branch, then across two lonely high mountains, until it reached the birthplace of another creek, called Hollybush. We followed this creek down toward the tiny community of Pippa Passes, where the post office is on

the campus of picturesque Alice Lloyd College, which serves the youth of that isolated area. There Irvin picked up more mail and retraced his route. It was a journey of 18 miles, and in perfect weather we completed it in a little over six hours—uncomfortable hours for me, since I had not ridden a horse in 20 years.

All the clients live near the beginning and end of the route, and for years most of Irvin's ride over the almost trackless ridges has been a ride among ghosts. Once 15 families lived up there, but now the roads and trails have disappeared. All that remain are the shells of sturdy log houses and outbuildings, and the ruins of a schoolhouse.

"The Howards and the Honeycuts lived up there in the old days," Irvin said. "They had a good life. Been gone a long time. I haven't seen a soul on these two ridges in years." He patted the bulge in his pocket where he carries a "right good .38-caliber special Smith & Wesson shootin' pistol," and said that infrequently he found it necessary to shoot a rabid fox.

Irvin made his round with dignified dispatch and declined the invitations to "come in and set." He waved a greeting and kept moving as he called back, "I reckon folks will be expecting me." He said he rarely had more than a dozen or so pieces of mail to carry, including magazines, but he tried to deliver anything addressed to people along his route. "Used to carry those big mail-order auto tires. Now I just say, 'You'uns go to the post office and fetch 'em.' Man's got to be reasonable. You can ask a horse to carry so much."

One woman on his route became a saleswoman for a home-products firm, and for a long time Irvin delivered packages from the manufacturer to her house. "Then it got to be upwards of 80 pounds. Lord, I'd have to have six arms. We worked it out where she goes and gets most of that stuff now."

**T**HERE WAS ONLY ONE PLACE where Irvin lingered for a few minutes, and that was at a small, neat cemetery. He pulled the horse over to the encircling fence and made a check of the graves so he could report to kinfolk that all was well. He remembers most of the people who are buried there, and after we left the cemetery he was silent for a long time.

Irvin's mail route seems certain to continue its decrease in numbers of people and increase in numbers of abandoned homes. Poverty,



CAMERON CALL, DESERET NEWS

## Old-fashioned delivery

Taking a turn from the Pony Express, Mark Mangelson delivers the Deseret News on horseback in Farmington on Christmas Eve. Snow along the Wasatch Front is possible through Christmas and into Thursday morning. High temperatures should be in the 40s.



open.”

The employees are volunteering their time while the business gets rolling again. Customers and friends have called from as far away as Florida, asking how they can help. And in an cutthroat business, competitors have called offering inventory and assistance.

“These people don’t have to do that, but they do,” Allison said.

The original shop is now blackened, with 8 feet of water in the basement from firefighters’ hoses. A yellow “Fireline, do not cross” tape is wrapped around the building. Openings are boarded up.

But in the middle of the dreariness is a bright new white vinyl sign with red letters stating cheerily, “Utah Ski and Golf has temporarily moved across the street inside the Olympus Hotel,” as if the owners decided to pop out for a soda and asked their customers to join them.

At the entrance to the hotel stands another testament to optimism: “Utah Ski & Golf now open — lower lobby.”

Rigoni said helping the Allisons was the decent thing to do. Besides “it’s a definite benefit to our guests (who ski), and that’s a good thing.”

Tracy Allison didn’t get any sleep Saturday night, the night of the fire. She got three hours Sunday night. She didn’t get any sleep Monday night because they were moving the business into the hotel. Then to make matters worse her 2-year-old son fell about midnight and hit his head, winding up in the emergency room.

Tuesday afternoon, with Christmas Eve celebrations just a few hours away, Allison is weary. She is not thinking clearly for lack of sleep, and she chokes up when she talks about the fire, but after everything that’s happened, good and bad, she’s cautiously optimistic.

“We’re hoping,” she said.

Employee Mark Buman sticks his head in the office door on his way out.

“There are lots of people renting,” he said.

Heart Medical Center.

When the Northwest MedStar helicopter finally lifted off, the Uhlenkotts were already racing

mal brain activity, and a week after the accident the Uhlenkotts were told “we think you’re going to get your daughter back.”